

Harper's BAZAAR

A FASHIONABLE LIFE

Collette DINNIGAN

The designer's
transformed Sydney
home reveals her
exacting eye
for ... well, just
about everything.
BY RACHEL SHARP.
PHOTOGRAPHED
BY NICK WATT



ART DIRECTED BY MANDY ALEX. HAIR BY DEAN McDONALD AT VAICONZ.
MAKEUP BY HAYLEY WAREING. COLLETTE DINNIGAN WEARS HER OWN LABEL.

Collette Dinnigan in her Sydney home's romantic dining room, where candles — not electricity — supply the ambience.



Designer Collette Dinnigan, in a dress from her new diffusion line, collette, with daughter Estella, partner Bradley Cocks and the family dog, Louis, at their restored home in Paddington, Sydney.

Collette Dinnigan's four-bedroom house in tree-lined Paddington, Sydney, represents two divine but opposing extremes.

Up close, the pick marks on its hand-cut sandstone bricks hint at its colonial 1800s origins. On the other hand, it's utterly modern — almost every part, from the room layout to the floorboards, kitchen, windows, bathrooms and even the existing pool and outdoor terrace were completely replaced, removed or reshaped by Dinnigan before her family moved in this January after 18 months of renovation. But if anyone can make the luxurious new look charmingly old, it's Dinnigan.

"I love the romance of this house," says the designer, who recently celebrated her 30th show at Paris fashion week and lives here with daughter Estella, six, her partner of three years, Bradley Cocks, their golden retriever, Louis, and burmese cat, Webber. "It's a real family home, not a place where a lot of guests come to stay, but everyone who walks in the door feels very comfortable. It's very welcoming ... and very private," says Dinnigan.

She's right. From the outside, the freestanding, two-storey cottage looks almost politely unassuming, separated from the street by a high white picket fence and simple garden. Its rear outdoor pool and sun-bathed garden terrace are completely hidden from neighbours'

view. But inside, it's a jaw-dropping blend of European-style neutral interiors and Australian sandstone. "I love grey with white floorboards," she says. "I love that sort of Scandinavian look."

There are plenty of design quirks as talking points, too. Its grand dining room, for example, has no electricity; just dozens of candles for romantic lighting. The enormous marble-topped kitchen bench-cum-breakfast bar took 20 men to lift in. Carting materials for the (also marble) second-storey bathroom necessitated the removal of all the stairs.

While Dinnigan says the redesign was a joint family effort, Canadian-born Cocks, who is senior vice-president at the luxury online travel service Kiwi

Collection, is quick to give her 100 per cent of the creative credit. "I think he's quite critical [of interiors] because he gets to stay in the best hotels in the world," she says of Cocks. "But he still likes my taste and [design] sensibility and the home life that we have together." Similarly, close friends agree she has a rare gift for designing elegant interiors.

"To me it's natural. I've got ideas and I can see a space and just feel it ... the fabrics and surfaces and colours," says Dinnigan. "Every house I've had, all my workplaces, I've redecorated; I wouldn't even think of getting an interior designer. But it's frustrating too, to know what you want when you can't find it. Like the exact shade of grey fabric — you spend ►

Australian heritage meets Scandinavian style in the home.



"Every house I've had I've redecorated ... I wouldn't even think of getting an interior designer."



A romantic chandelier (left) in the dining room; and a neutral palette frames works by John Olsen in the living area.

A FASHIONABLE LIFE

A work by David Bromley takes pride of place in Dinnigan's daughter, Estella's room.

hours and weeks and days looking and you still can't find it. Often you just have to create it yourself."

Cocks, who strolls in during *BAZAAR*'s interview after taking Louis for a morning walk, laughs when asked if he can guess what Dinnigan's favourite part of the house might be.

"It's that room," he says, pointing to the formal dining area just off the modern kitchen. "That's Collette's masterpiece. You should have seen what it was like before. She had all of these ideas, and I was like, 'Hmm, I can't really see it', but then it all came to life and I was like, 'OK, I understand now'."

It is without question the most romantic room in the house; a fairytale combination of sandstone, wood, mirrors, glass, silver and white candles. "The light all [comes] from candles and a chandelier I got from Parterre in Woollahra, but it was from France originally. I think it's probably 19th century, 18th century," says Dinnigan. "I just love candlelight, especially for dinner; that's what's so nice and intimate and cosy about [this room]. I hate going to a restaurant when there's bright downlights."

As with the rest of the house, each piece in the dining room has a story. "I don't want to go somewhere and feel like I just bought up the shop. I bought the chairs in a bazaar in India and found this table in a Danish cheese factory. These [glass and silver bottles] are pieces I've collected over the years from Paris."

The house's colour palette was kept neutral to showcase the artworks — a diverse collection including pieces by Archibald winner Guy Maestri, John Olsen and Czech photographer Miroslav Tichý, the last found in the Michael Hoppen Gallery in London. "He made his own camera out of tins and glass, and he started photographing different women and things ... I just loved that. I tend to collect little pieces."

While the home feels lived in, there are few signs of the havoc created by a typical six-year-old. But Estella, by her mother's account, has inherited Dinnigan's chic sensibility. She may even be a decorator in the making: the only thing she's

"We want intimacy and informality at home ... we aren't pretentious, that's not our personality."

ever scribbled on, says Dinnigan, are two white chairs, one with the word "Mummy", and the other, "Bradley".

"Estella is very good, touch wood. To date, the white couches are still white." With interiors clearly a passion, Dinnigan admits she'd eventually love to branch into homewares. "For many years, I've wanted to do homewares, and linens and things like that, but I just need to apply myself to it. We've just launched our diffusion fashion collection [collette], which is a whole new label, so that would be another label as well."

For now, she intends to keep the large renovation projects personal. As well as a stunning country home in Milton, New South Wales, the designer still owns a second, even larger Paddington property just one street away, where she lived for eight years prior.

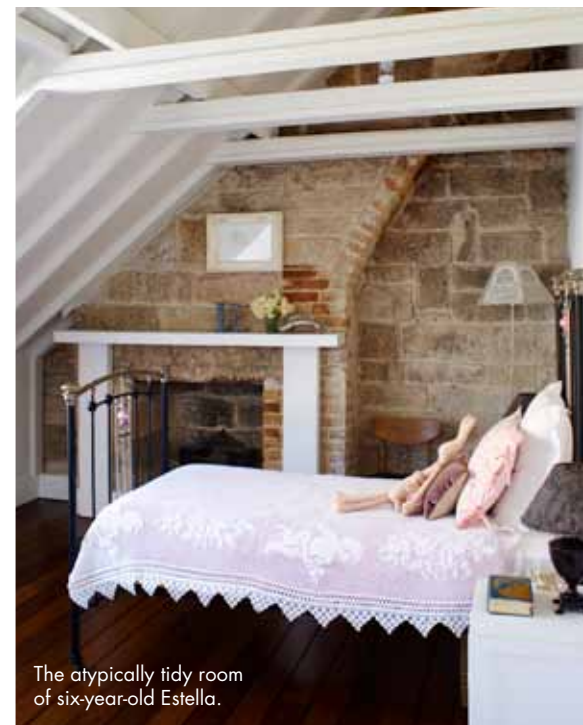
"I spent a lot of time doing the other house up too, but this is so different. They're both amazing houses, but this is

like the old charmer and that's like *Miami Vice*," she says, laughing. After wavering about which of the two she wanted to keep — Dinnigan initially listed the smaller home for sale this year — the family has decided to settle at the cottage. "We really, really like it here. In summer it's great to sit outside at night ... I've lived in Paddington for about 20 years; I love the village environment ... I love a community. That's important to us."

"Bradley is constantly away and reviewing luxury hotels and my business is busy too, so we don't want to have a big life," continues the designer. "We want intimacy and informality at home ... we aren't pretentious, that's not our personality."

"This is our home, it's welcoming, although a circus at times. There is never a dull moment. Everyone feels they can just knock on the door. They don't have to announce themselves. That's what makes it a home."

ART DIRECTED BY MANDY ALEX IN THIS PORTFOLIO: HAIR BY DEAN McDONALD AT VALONZ; MAKEUP BY HAYLEY WAREING. COLLETTE DINNIGAN WEARS HER OWN LABEL



The atypically tidy room of six-year-old Estella.



Dinnigan, by a Guy Maestri canvas in the formal living room.



Exposed sandstone walls provide a warm backdrop to a Robert Malherbe painting.



Pieces collected from across the globe are dotted around the home.